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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LILONGWE 000612

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR INR/B

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SUBJECT: MALAWI'S NEW MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS SEEKS
STRONG TIES WITH U.S.

REF: A. LILONGWE 520

[1](#)B. LILONGWE 514

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY. Dr. George Chaponda, Malawi's new Minister of Foreign Affairs was sworn in on June 16 (reftel A). Chaponda, after nearly twenty years of UNHCR service, seems eager to raise standards of professionalism and fiscal discipline in his ministry, and would like to explore the possibility of establishing a Malawi mission to the UN in Geneva. Chaponda anticipates progress on the Nacala Corridor project and looks forward to working with the USG in his efforts to reduce poverty and increase economic growth in Malawi. Biographical information begins in paragraph 6. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) On June 28, CDA paid an introductory call to new Minister of Foreign Affairs George Chaponda. Accompanied by DCM and Poloff (notetaker), the CDA's visit served as post's introduction to the minister. Chaponda, an experienced UN diplomat, said that the new GOM intends to professionalize and streamline it's diplomatic corps. He said he is interested in ensuring that GOM embassies abroad "are proactive in promoting trade, investment, and tourism." Chaponda did not give any indication of the veracity of recent rumors that the GOM may soon begin closing embassies as a cost-saving measure, though he did indicate that he would be in favor of possible consolidation or downsizing. Chaponda indicated that the GOM would like the chance to use whatever "incentives" may be available in order to establish a mission to the UN in Geneva, noting that he had previously advocated for this, and would continue to do so even if it means folding an existing embassy nearby into a new one in Geneva.

[1](#)3. (U) When asked about GOM delays in signing a Direct Agreement with OPIC which would guarantee a \$30 million loan to rehabilitate the Nacala Corridor (reftel B), Chaponda said he "didn't see any problem with it moving forward." He believed that GOM resolution was forthcoming, and assured CDA he would pass along to the Minister of Trade the USG's desire to see the project completed.

[1](#)4. (U) Chaponda expressed his eagerness to work in partnership with the USG in order to achieve President Mutharika's goals of reducing poverty and increasing economic growth in Malawi. Recalling his extensive personal knowledge of the long association between the USG and GOM, he cited the Peace Corps as a valuable component of USG assistance. He said he regretted that a scheduling conflict (Chaponda departed Malawi on June 29 for the AU conference in Addis Ababa) would prevent his attendance at the mission's official Independence Day celebration on July 1. He added that he is planning to attend the upcoming UNGA, and said that President Mutharika may do so as well (reported septel).

[1](#)5. (SBU) COMMENT. Chaponda's extensive international experience and substantial education are readily apparent. He gave the impression he is engaged, articulate, and generally friendly to the USG. His educational and professional experience have allowed him to live and work in the US, and he seemed eager to maintain strong ties with the USG in his ministerial role. His support of President Mutharika was also on display, as Chaponda repeatedly referred to the President's economic goals. We expect Chaponda will be a competent, articulate, and loyal public servant as Minister of Foreign Affairs. END COMMENT.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION: DR. GEORGE CHAPONDA

[1](#)6. (SBU) Chaponda, a newcomer to Malawian politics and the United Democratic Front (UDF) inner circle, entered Malawi's political scene in 2003 when he contested and won the position of the party's Director of Research, defeating former UDF heavyweight and then Minister of Lands Thengo Maloya. In the 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections, Chaponda won a parliamentary seat in Mulanje and became Minister of Foreign Affairs in newly-elected President Bingu wa Mutharika's cabinet. As a retired UN official, he has extensive international experience. Close associates describe him as a quiet and thoughtful man.

17. (U) Chaponda worked for UNHCR for nearly twenty years before retiring in 2002. His UNHCR assignments included Head of Legal Section in Mogadishu (1983-1985); Deputy Representative to Kenya (1985-1989); Head of Legal Section in Bangkok (1989-1992); Deputy Representative to Bangladesh (1993-1994); Chief of Section for Recruitment and Emergency Staffing, Geneva (1994-1995); Head of Sub-Office in Ngara, Tanzania (1995-1996); Deputy Regional Representative, Austria (1996-1998); Resident Representative, Poland (1998-2000). In 2002 Chaponda served as UNHCR Deputy Regional Director, East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region, based in Addis Ababa. Concurrent with his ministerial position, he is also serving as the UDF's Director of Research.

18. (U) Chaponda spent much of his youth in Zambia. After attending Blantyre Secondary School in Malawi, he completed a B.A. and M.A. in Political Science/History at the University of New Delhi in India. He then completed a law degree in Zambia, and obtained his JD at Yale School of Law in 1984. While working at Yale as a visiting lecturer, he was recruited by UNHCR.

19. (SBU) Chaponda is from the same Lomwe ethnic group as President Mutharika. They both hail from Mulanje District in the Southern Region.

110. (SBU) Chaponda is the uncle of former National Democratic Alliance (NDA) member of Parliament Lizzie Mpinganjira, who is the wife of NDA president and former presidential candidate Brown Mpinganjira.

11. (U) Digital photo will be sent to INR/B via email.
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